**1. In the space below, describe the stasis at the beginning of Trifles. In other words, “Where are we?” “When is it (time, day, and year)?” “Who are the people involved?” “What is the dramatic situation in which the characters find themselves as the play unfolds?”**

Trifles takes place within the abandoned farmhouse of John Wright and his wife, Minnie Foster. The abandoned house is in a secluded area within the woods and is away from any major road. The play is set during the fall or early winter, and is most likely within the state of Nebraska during the early 20th century in a rural county. Key characters involved include the husband and wife (Wright and Foster), the County Sherriff and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Hale, and the County Attorney. All have come into the old farmhouse in response to the death of John Wright – hanged in his own bed while his wife slept next to him. The men – the Sherriff, the Attorney, and Mr. Hale – all leave to discuss Mr. Hale’s memory of discovering Wright’s body and to discuss what evidence they may come across. The women – Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters – consider their own opinions as to what happened on the night of Wright’s murder and the motive behind whoever committed the crime.   
  
**2. What is the intrusion that causes the stasis to be broken and the dramatic action to develop, often at an increasingly rapid pace, to the end of the play?**

The characters moving from room to room is the most important tool in developing and forcing the dramatic action within Trifles. The female characters are the most direct evidence of this, with their observations of items left behind in the rooms and the state of the rooms themselves providing the most insight into Wright and Foster’s lives together. As they continue to pick out items that Minnie would probably appreciate having while being held in custody, these characters are the ones to discover the most obvious “evidence” for what happened to John Wright. The discovery of the dead bird is the intrusion event.   
  
**3. Why do the events of the play take place at this particular time and place? In other words, what is the unique factor that is out of the ordinary that causes a turn of events to take place?**

Wright’s farmhouse could not have been opened for evidence until the County Attorney could travel back from Omaha, which was two days after Wright’s body was discovered by Mr. Hale. The year setting (1916) was most likely chosen by Glaspell because during that time, women could not vote and were still seen only in gender-normative terms. Setting it afterwards would not have the same commentary on the idea of “justice” because Foster’s innocence would not be so easily determined by an all-male jury.   
  
**4. State the dramatic question or questions that must be answered by the end of the play? (Ordinarily, the dramatic question shares a close connection with the intrusion.)**

Will the truth about Minnie Foster be uncovered by the men? If it is, will they be able to give as much gravity to her experience as the women could? Was Wright’s murder warranted or justified? Is it right that Foster will go free?   
  
**5. Use Ms. Hale to answer the questions concerning character. Ball says, a character is revealed by what he/she does, that is the dramatic actions that are taken. Examine what the character wants (NOTE: In Trifles the wants of Ms. Hale change as the play progresses). The wants of a character often encounter obstacles that get in the way of achieving those wants. Ball says there are 4 kinds of obstacles that frustrate the wants of a character. They are: a. Me against myself, b. Me against another individual, c. Me against society (that is law, social norms, etc.) and, d. Me against fate, the universe, natural forces, God or the gods. In answering these questions be sure to point to the particular obstacles that demonstrate these obstacles for Ms. Hale.**

At the start of Trifles, Mrs. Hale’s goal is simply to gather things from the front closet to take to Minnie Foster while she sits in custody. Most of the items are simply clothes or things that she may enjoy seeing again – a favorite shawl, one of her canned fruit jars, or her sewing. However, as she moves around the kitchen to get these, she and Mrs. Peters continue to turn up evidence suggesting that Minnie is more guilty than she may seem. The birdcage is uncovered after the jar, and the sewing reveals the stitch-change that probably occurred after Minnie hanged John. Minnie’s sewing also reveals the largest clue to her guilt – her bird with a wrung neck. As she sees the evidence mounting, she must process her own guilt of not visiting more or not somehow preventing what Minnie did by offering her companionship. After seeing what these items reveal, she cannot separate them from how they fit into the story of John’s murder. Slowly, she considers more of Minnie’s situation under John’s domineering control and is the first to cover the bird with quilting pieces. Mrs. Hale actively keeps evidence from the Sherriff and Attorney, as well as her husband. She is also the one who holds the box in the end. Mrs. Hale, therefore, wants Minnie avoid a death sentence for murdering her husband, because she recognizes the destruction of spirit that drove Minnie to kill John.

**6. The most important information in most plays takes place during theatrical moments. In your estimation what is the most theatrical moment in Trifles and what happens during that moment which is so important to the outcome of the play?**

I believe the most theatrical moment in Trifles is the final section where the men are glancing at what the women have found to bring in to Minnie. Hidden under the pieces is the box with the dead bird inside, which Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale later hide in their own pockets to protect Minnie from being discovered as the murderer. This scene illustrates the commonality of women experiencing the kind of loss and loneliness that drove Minnie’s psychotic episode – and is reiterated in the dialogue leading up to the birds discovery (Mrs. Peters losing a baby and having a pet killed in front of her).   
  
**7. Provide at least three examples of images in Trifles. How does the title of the play help us understand the images in the play? (Remember Ball says that, “An image is the use of something we know that tells us something we don’t know.” He goes on to say that images invoke and expand, rather than define and limit.”)**

The broken birdcage, the bird itself, and the quilting are all three key images in Trifles. These seemingly innocuous items are overlooked by the men as pointless and simply just “kitchen things” for women to concern themselves with or empty trifles. However, these three things all point to Minnie’s outright guilt, which would result in a conviction. The broken birdcage and the bird also serve as stand-ins for Minnie’s life with John and how it was crushed by his abusive tendencies. The chair also serves to stand in for Minnie within the scene itself.  **8. Ordinarily, there are many themes in most plays. List the themes in Trifles.**  Women in their roles as individuals and how that identity is altered during marriage.

Appearance versus actuality

Justice and the constraints of the law; grey areas between right and wrong.

Oversimplification of women by men (as only housewives, being looked upon condescendingly)

**9. Most American plays have something to do with family and/or family relationships. What does family have to do with Trifles? Is family redefined in Trifles?**

Trifles serves as a commentary on the traditional American perception of the family, particularly on the balance between men and women as spouses. Minnie Foster’s theorized lonely life at the hands of her domineering husband most likely drove her to murder. The idea of tragedy, however, is directed less at the death of John Wright and more for the loss of Minnie’s light and fire, her joy, and her identity beyond being judged as a homemaker and housekeeper. Trifles judges the plight of the housewife and the trapped situation many American women had to deal with – a “lonely” house with no children but time to work or a “lively” house with many children but being constantly overwhelmed. In either situation, a woman was not imagined to have a life outside of the home. While the play doesn’t necessarily call for no marriage or no children, it examines the extreme psychological constraints that happen to women when society no longer sees them as an individual person and simply “someone’s spouse”.